

MACOMB

Clerk's Office fights immigration fraud

■ Secured Web site will verify birth certificates for those seeking Social Security numbers.

By Chad Selweski
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Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh joins those fighting illegal immigration and terrorism by creating a new program to prevent fraudulent use of Social Security numbers.

Sabaugh's office has created a secure, high-tech system to help the Social Security Administration verify the authenticity of birth certificates of people seeking a Social Security number. The program is expected to save the SSA \$257,000 over five years by conducting the verification process over a secured Web site.

"They are so excited about it," Sabaugh said, "because they are going to save a lot of money and man-hours."

The verification of all birth certificates for those applying for a Social Security card, including newborns, was mandated by a federal law, the Immigra-

tion Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act, which took effect last November.

Since then, the local SSA offices had brought stacks of paperwork to the county clerk's office on a periodic basis to undertake the verification process. The new Internet program, believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, was launched two months ago.

The verification process is designed to prevent terrorists or illegal immigrants from gaining a U.S. identity, and it combats document fraud that leads to identity theft.

William Seaman, an SSA district

manager, said the Macomb County service could serve as a model program for clerk's offices throughout Michigan and perhaps across the nation.

U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, ranking Democrat on a House subcommittee that oversees the Social Security program, has also praised the effort. The Royal Oak Democrat will present Sabaugh on Wednesday with a copy of the congressional record that includes his House statements supporting the program.

The Web site is secured through a password and only authorized workers are allowed to use it. If a computer hack-

er circumvented the process, the site offers no personal information or birth certificate images that could be stolen.

The one-time cost of implementing the system, \$4,000, was financed by the SSA.

Sabaugh's office relied on Internet technology previously employed by her staff to put information about business registrations, death records, campaign finance reports and gun permits on her Web page.

The clerk said the Internet services allow her workers to spend more time at her office's counter providing service to those people who walk in seeking assistance.